

***Disputed Territories: Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies***  
**David Trigger and Gareth Griffiths, eds.**

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There is much lazy scholarship analysing the fraught territories of land, culture, and identity, particularly within Australia. Such work seldom progresses beyond the maxim that since colonisation one culture (usually homogenised) and its agents has ridden roughshod over another and continues to do so. Better analytical models and increasing theoretical sophistication have not led to more complex and nuanced readings of either settlers or the colonised, but to pointed and all too often sanctimonious exposés of ongoing oppression and further Othering processes. Save for glib analogies, too little of this work is cognisant of how (or even where, it sometimes seems) parallel issues and the accompanying contestations have been and are being played out. Whilst this exceptionalism and parochial concern is mostly implicit, it is no less apparent for it.

Trigger's and Griffiths' edited volume makes a refreshing contribution to the discussion of disputed territories in settler societies. Whilst in no sense exculpatory or less critical of the experiences of indigenes within such societies, the contributors to this volume provoke the discussion into areas where it needs to go. Less hidebound to indigenous-settler relations orthodoxy, they raise issues that too few do. David Trigger alerts the reader to this in his useful introduction. He explains how the forthcoming chapters "focus on the making of identity in two settler regions" (1) where there are continuing "negotiations over the meanings of land and place" (1). Absent here are the notions of identity (and authenticity) as a hereditary given and the experience of belonging a privilege peculiar to autochthones. Both identity and belonging are instead the products of intellectual investment, an investment made and continually remade by settlers and colonised alike. Furthermore, such investment is not made in ignorance of or despite encounters between cultures, but arises through dialogic awareness of an Other and difference. Whilst not all contributors expand upon these points they nevertheless serve to sustain a sense of coherency to what might otherwise be a collection of disparate papers.

Catherine Nash (29-52) does expand upon the above points in the first chapter. She does so by examining the popular questing for Irish roots,

focusing in particular on "what happens when questions of nationality, ethnicity and identity meet in the practice of genealogy in Ireland" (41). For many the Ireland that they seek does not exist, and at best only partially realises their investments in particular forms of identity and belonging. And just as Ireland is well integrated in global processes and is not the isolated, provincial, rural Catholic backwater that some desire to find, people tracing their roots often overlook the branches of the family tree that record their own mixedness. Furthermore, thorough research can unearth unexpected and confronting pasts which similarly challenge particular investments in identity and belonging. In "tracking the flows of genealogical desire between Ireland and other places," Nash "reveal[s] the contradictory, interconnected and differentiated cultural politics of 'belonging'" (47). Nash succeeds in her endeavour to avoid the "naively celebratory" and "crudely cynical and dismissive" (46) summations of emotive attachment to place and the identities wrought through such attachments. Whilst links to an imagined Ireland are the focus of the chapter, the explorations of identity and belonging are pertinent to any postcolonial settler society.

Michèle Dominy's (53-80) contribution considers the processes forming "settler-descendant indigeneity" amongst the owners of sheep stations in New Zealand's south island high country. Introduced grass is the vehicle through which the transformation of settler-descendants from aliens to *in situ* belonging is explored. Dominy argues persuasively that settler-descendants, like Maori, "are an extension of country and country an expression of" them (63). The material commodity of introduced grass allows for an explanation of the development of this relationship independent of the need to appropriate Maori forms of establishing the same, whilst also allowing for contiguity in how and why these relationships between people and land and land and people develop. Dominy's thesis scythes through the simplistic notion that settlers are alienated from the land they inhabit and that indigenes alone can truly belong. In this way Dominy escapes the all too familiar binaries and illustrates beautifully one of the themes of the collection, that both indigenes and settlers have intellectual investments in landscape and are both involved in negotiations over the meanings of land and place. (Nick Gill discusses a somewhat similar theme in his examination of the relationship between Australian pastoralists and their land. See his "The Contested Domain of Pastoralism: Landscape, Work and Outsiders in Central Australia." *Tracking Knowledge in North Australian Landscapes: Studies in Indigenous and Settler Ecological Knowledge*

*Systems*. Ed. Deborah Bird Rose and Anne Clarke. Canberra and Darwin: North Australia Research Unit and Australian National University, 1997. 50-67).

Contested and changing notions of wilderness (wildness) are examined in the context of Tasmania by Roslynn Haynes (81-107). Whilst much of the discussion will be familiar to many if not most readers—the analysis offers little that is new—it does usefully draw together a number of hitherto disparate sources. Haynes' statement that "the Palawa were no more enamoured than the British settlers of what the latter termed wilderness" (83) stands testament to the fact that she is neither a romanticist nor sentimentalist. The analysis is strengthened by the absence of these indulgences, and this points to another refreshing aspect of the entire text, for none of the contributors resort to facile romanticism.

By focusing on *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a material object and tracing its journeying as such in southern Africa, Isabel Hofmeyr (131-53) explains the significance of how texts not only travel into colonies but also within. In these intra-African (in this instance) circuits (140), texts create new imaginative spaces that belie the orthodox binaries of "African / European or Western / indigenous" (143). Most significantly, these new imaginings provide impetus, reason, and foundation for indigenous critiques of their own societies and cultures (see also Dominy 62). The importance of recognising this cannot be overstated, for amongst other things it imbues indigenes with an agency that is often overlooked. Cultural change can then be explained not only as a consequence of the ravages of colonialism, but also as a consequence of internal critiques based on new knowledge.

Not only texts and landscapes contain stories and convey historical information: pictures do too. Ian McLean (109-29) argues "that artworks are especially useful in understanding the subtleties and complexities of the times in which they were made" (110), and he proceeds to demonstrate how this is so through analysis of the landscape drawings of two very different artists illustrating "The picturesque at Sydney Cove 200 years ago" (118). It is deft scholarship, rendering accessible to any reader his key argument. McLean also provides an informative critique of the various aesthetic theories elaborating the picturesque.

Maps also tell stories and convey historical information, and two chapters explore different problems associated with mapping and representation. Neville White's (187-205) discussion of Yolngu (northern Australia) aesthetics of place explains how difficult it is to translate "some

aspects of Yolngu meaningful landscapes" (192). There is some productive tension between White's chapter and Norman Etherington's (207-32), which alleges "genocide by cartography ... in maps of the south-eastern African interior" (207). Whilst White is concerned with the inherent difficulties, perhaps impossibility, of attempting to represent Yolgnu aesthetics of place, Etherington instead seeks lineal precision and suggests the commission of genocide by lack of cartographic accuracy. Why should we presume that the peoples of the south-eastern African interior did not (do not?) similarly have an aesthetics of place that the cartographic accuracy sought by Etherington would obfuscate? Herein lies the tension between these two chapters, however, it is up to the reader to detect this tension and resolve it themselves. Not that this is a problem but it is something that Gareth Griffiths (297-316) could have raised in the "Afterword", the most disappointing section of the text. Etherington's chapter, concerned as it is with the accuracy of geographic representation in maps of the south-eastern African interior, requires much cross-checking from the text to the illustrations in order to follow the argument. This is only in part due to this reader's unfamiliarity with the region.

Valda Blundell's (155-85) chapter discusses the striking *Wandjina* images of the Kimberley region and their recent translation into contemporary art forms. The continuing cultural context of the *Wandjina* is also described well. In an early section of her argument Blundell relies on what she describes as the "aesthetic anthropology" of Clifford Geertz. Geertz is a renowned anthropologist, although those less enamoured with Geertz (and his acolytes) will most likely find points of disagreement. Whilst Geertz is a distraction for this reader, he is not crucial to Blundell's overall cogent argument. Blundell's analysis also demonstrates how the Dreaming, *Wandjina* rock art, and contemporary art forms constitute continuing and constantly renegotiated intellectual investments in place and belonging, thus illustrating the text's theoretical *raison d'être* from another perspective.

The chapter by Jane Carruthers (233-68) is another strong analysis of issues germane to the text's theme of disputed territories. In "comparing the significance of the Kalahari Gemsbok and Uluru—Kata Tjuta national parks" (232), Carruthers demonstrates the value of doing comparative work such as this. It assists in shedding light on factors that might otherwise be overlooked. In embedding discussions on land, culture, and identity in settler-societies in wider contexts, it helps to jog debate beyond stifling

parochialism. Importantly, Carruthers remains sensitive to local distinctions and differences, and these too help extend the debate.

Whilst Paul Carter's (269-95) contribution is relevant to the theme of the text it is less convincing. Concerned with how "the history of Western cartography is also the history of western imperialism" and with how "[t]he graphic language of the map ... is cognate with a cultural design on the land" (272), Carter hypothesises a graphic technique that would be "capable of indicating places in a non-territorial way" (289). This would better enable places to be represented dynamically and as relationally fluid, instead of as fixed sites determined in advance (284). The brevity of the chapter does not allow the complex ideas contained within sufficient explanation or room for corroborating evidence and some of the analogies appear forced. Too much has to be assumed in advance and points crucial to the argument accepted on little more than the author's say so. This is ironic given that one of the chapter's criticisms of place in Western cartography is that it is pre-determined as fixed site. Also, and disappointingly given that there is much of interest in this chapter, it is the least accessible within the volume. In places it is too jargonistic, self-consciously clever, prissy even, to be effective in conveying its important thesis to a wider interdisciplinary readership, which is precisely the readership for which this text is intended. Nevertheless, there are delightful incidental exceptions to this overarching criticism, and the paragraph detailing how "[t]he association of territory with the linear narrative of progress explains why recalcitrant environments were condemned in moral terms" (278) is an example.

This is a valuable collection that deserves to be well thumbed, and it is certainly of interest to a number of disciplines. Hopefully it will find its way into the field of Aboriginal and Indigenous Studies too, for it would assist in disturbing the complacency which characterises too much of the work held in that field's embrace. Nevertheless, the proclaimed significance of the collection's interdisciplinarity and gathering of textualist and ethnographic methodologies is overblown. In this respect only the text does not chart new ground.

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